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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: CIVIL DOCUMENT SECURITY IN GUYANA: THE  
GENERAL REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

**¶1.** SUMMARY: A Vice Consul covering the anti-fraud portfolio and a Fraud Investigator LES visited the General Registrar's Office (GRO) to observe how civil documents in Guyana are issued and safeguarded. Although these systems are becoming more secure, there are gaps in the systems which cause concern to the Consular Section. END SUMMARY.

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A short overview of birth records in Guyana  
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**¶2.** Before 1987 requests for birth records were submitted to the Registrar General by the midwife or attendant. Although regulations were in place to allow both parents' names, whether married or not, to appear on the birth record, due to poor legal interpretation this was not generally practiced until approximately 1983. Before that time, the father's name generally only appeared if the parents were married to each other. Guyanese law states that once a man marries a woman, the children held in common can have his name listed on their birth certificate. This means that even if a man were to marry a woman when they were each 65 and the woman's child was 40, the child's birth certificate could be amended to read that the mother's husband is the father of the child. When this is done, the birth registration is 're-registered' and the re-registration is noted on the birth certificate.

There is a plan underway, supported by the GRO, to pass a law that would allow a man to petition the court to have his name added to a child's birth record. If this law is passed, this could become a new vehicle for fraud. It is not clear whether or not there would be any note on birth certificates indicating that the father's name was listed through a petition to the court.

Parents can also 'late register' a child. Most late registrations take place shortly before a child enrolls in nursery school. In some cases, the Consular Section sees beneficiaries who were not registered until months before they were petitioned for by a relative. A late registration can be done at any time.

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REQUIREMENTS TO REGISTER A CHILD AND THE ISSUANCE PROCESS  
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**¶3.** Many of the usual safeguards to ensure accurate birth registrations in the U.S. are not practiced in Guyana. To register a child the parent(s) must complete a registration form (which is a triplicate form) and bring the completed form to a registration center. There are 400 registration

centers located in health clinics and hospitals throughout Guyana. Until recently, approximately 2002, regulations requiring parent(s) to provide identification to register a child was not strictly enforced. This means that a brother could easily stand in for another brother and sign for a child as if it were his own. The Consular Section knows of incidents where this has occurred.

The registration form and the fee (which does not even cover the cost of paper and shipping, let alone staff salaries) are forwarded to the GRO in Georgetown where the registration form is filed and the birth certificate is issued.

Birth certificates are written by hand by approximately twelve clerks. The clerks must account for each birth certificate. At the beginning of the day, they sign for a quantity of blank certificates. Each clerk has a log book in which they record the certificate number and the name of the person to whom it was issued. Based on FPU checks, the certificate number and the name do not always match. At the end of the day, the clerks return the unused certificates to their manager. The Registrar said that it is possible that some of the clerks could alter information on a birth certificate during the transcription process due to lack of oversight.

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THE DOCUMENT ITSELF

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14. Birth certificates are printed on whatever paper is available to the printer, according to the Registrar. Over

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the last year, there have been at least three different paper stocks used: a light green polka dot, a stark white and a white with a light green overlay. This constant changeover in paper stocks makes it difficult for new Consular officers to authenticate birth certificates. On the other hand, once a Consular officer becomes acquainted with the various paper stocks and when they were issued, s/he can easily distinguish a 1999 certificate from a 2004 certificate. Birth certificates are printed in batches of 50,000 certificates. Each batch requires a separate tender. Although the same printer has been used for a number of years, he is not assured of being awarded the contract and does not keep extra stocks available. The Registrar would like to use a more secure and consistent paper stock but does not have the space available to store the paper.

Security features in birth certificates are inconsistent. Some birth certificates have embossed certificate numbers, others do not. In a recent print, some of the certificates had embossed numbers, while others did not, making it difficult for Consular officers to detect fake birth certificates. One fairly consistent security feature throughout the birth certificates is the embossed "Certificate of Birth" across the top and an embossed border. The ink color is not consistent, changes from print to print and changes within a printing as the ink runs out. There are no watermarks, threads or UV-sensitive ink in any of the birth certificates. The Registrar would like a more secure document, but has no funds to pay for these security features.

The most secure of the security features is the dry seal. Each birth certificate is sealed with a dry seal. The dry seal changed from the word 'GUYANA' to the coat of arms of Guyana in late 2001.

15. If there were a fire at the GRO all birth records for all persons born in Guyana would be destroyed. The GRO is

located on the fourth floor of the Guyana Post Office Building, a concrete structure in the clustered downtown Georgetown area. Along one wall, which is made entirely of windows covered in mesh, there is a walkway. All of the walls inside the structure are made of wood, as is the racks on which the bound volumes of birth certificates are kept. There are two sets of original bound volumes in which all of the birth certificates are recorded. They are both kept in the same office.

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BIRTH CERTIFICATE FRAUD

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¶6. The Consular Section sees a number of fraudulent birth certificates every week. Although some of these appear not to be on authentic birth certificate paper stock, many of them are. Recently, after admitting to presenting a fraudulent birth certificate, two applicants said that a relative in New York sent the birth certificate to them. In both of these cases, the birth certificates were printed on authentic paper, but with a counterfeit seal.

Consular Officers and the Registrar General believe that some of the paper stocks have been stolen or that the printer prints extra copies for document vendors.

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OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSIST

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¶7. The Registrar's Office is plagued with opportunities for fraud and misfeasance. This directly impacts the safety and security of the American people. Persons could easily obtain a legitimate document with altered information. These documents could facilitate visa issuance. One of the Mission's MPP indicators is to provide equipment and training in record keeping to the Registrar's Office. USAID has a proven track record of improving registry databases in other countries. The Mission feels that upgrading the registry system should be a priority project for USAID in order to meet the MPP indicator.

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